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NATIONAL REPENTANCE the only means of averting
NATIONAL JUDGMENTS.

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DISCOURSE

Preached at the

P A R I S H C H U R C H

OF

ST. PAUL COVENT-GARDEN,

On FEBRUARY 12, 1758.

Being the SUNDAY preceding

THE GENERAL FAST.

By GEORGE DAVIS, M.A.

Affistant-Preacher at the said Church.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

L O N D O N:

Printed for S. BAKER, in York-street, Covent-Garden, and G. KEITH,
at the Bible and Crown in Gracechurch-street. 1758.

NATIONAL REPENTANCE the only means of saving
NATIONAL JUDGMENTS.

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Preached at the

PARISH CHURCH

OF

ST. PAUL COVENT-GARDEN.

On JANUARY 12, 1758.



Being the SUNDAY preceding

THE GENERAL FAST.

By GEORGE DAVIS, M.A.

Assistant-Preacher at the said Church.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

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JONAH iii. 10.
And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way, and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them, and he did it not.

WHEN the iniquity of the *Ninevites* cried aloud to heaven for vengeance, and the Divine Being, wearied with their heinous and repeated transgressions, was preparing to inflict it, he commissioned *Jonah* to warn them of the impending Blow. The prophet, well acquainted with God's mercy and loving kindness, and his readiness to receive all who truly turn to him, and apprehending that if the devoted people made a proper use of this denunciation, by confessing and forsaking those sins which had occasioned it, the execution of it would be superseded, and by that means his own credit and veracity very probably suffer; was flying to a distant country, to avoid so disagreeable an employment: But being afterwards reclaimed, by a miraculous interposition, to a

proper sense of his fault, and reduced to obedience; entered the city, and pronounced, as he was commanded, this alarming sentence against it.—“ Yet forty days and *Nineveh* shall be overthrown.”—Struck with all the horror that such a prediction was calculated to inspire, and conscious how justly they deserved to have it fulfilled against them in its utmost rigour, they had recourse to the only means by which they could hope it might be averted: they immediately betook themselves to humiliation and repentance. “ They proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest of them, even to the least of them. For word came unto the King of *Nineveh*, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes: And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout *Nineveh*, (by the decree of the King and of his Nobles) saying, let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing; let them not feed nor drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: Yea let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands: Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?” Nor was he deceived in his expectation; for as it follows in the next verse, “ God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way, and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them, and he did it not.”

As this memorable passage of History was doubtless recorded for the use of all succeeding ages, and as from the invariable nature of the Divine Being, and the uniform Goodness and Mercy with which

which he constantly acts towards the children of men, we may reasonably hope that whenever a people in the like circumstances, shall be awakened to a similar sense of their guilt and of their duty, "he will also repent of the evil that he has threatened to do unto them, and do it not;" I must desire your most serious attention, while, in order to enforce more strongly the instruction it conveys, and the behaviour it inculcates, I endeavour to represent to you, the evils with which we of these nations, are at present threatened, and the means by which, with the Blessing of providence, we may hope to escape them.

Now the Evils with which we are threatened, are no less than the loss of Every thing that is dear and valuable to us, whether considered in a religious, civil, or social capacity; as Men, as *Britons*, as Christians, or as Protestants.

We are engaged in War with a very formidable Enemy, who wants not the will, and as some recent instances have fatally shewn, is but too fully possessed of the power, to do us the most material injuries. And should God, in punishment for our manifold offences, permit them to go on in their career, should "they who *so inveterately* hate us, once become Lords over us," their conquest would immediately be followed by the destruction of the purest, and best constituted Church upon the face of the Earth. The Scriptures, the only sure guides of our faith, and directors of our practice, must then be exchanged for idle tales and ridiculous legends. Instead of paying our adoration "to the one
" true

“ true God and the one mediator between God and man, the “ man Christ Jesus,” we must then worship Saints and Angels ; we must fall down and prostrate ourselves before the reliëts and bones of Martyrs, real or pretended ; before a graven Image, or a consecrated Wafer. Our rational and primitive form of Worship, the very “ beauty of holiness” so admirably calculated to promote true piety and devotion in all who attend upon it, must then be given up for a ritual, pompous indeed in its ceremonies, but absurd and superstitious in their application ; and of consequence destructive of every thing that can lay claim to the name of either. Or if “ standing fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has “ made us free” we should bravely refuse “ to be again entangled “ in the yoke of bondage ;” Should our own convictions, supported by the assistances of divine grace, enable us to oppose such abominations ; fines, confiscations, banishment and imprisonment, the galley or the stake, would then be our portion. This, we know, was the fate of our ancestors under princes of their own nation, from whom they might have expected, and who had indeed promised, in the most solemn manner, and upon the most solemn occasions, a far different treatment. This, we know, is at this present hour the condition of our Brethren of the reformation in *France*. And can it be expected that Popery would wear a milder aspect to vassals and slaves, or be exercised with greater lenity towards a conquered people, than towards its own natural born subjects ? On the contrary, is it not reasonable to believe that persecution would then be let loose against

us in all its terrors? That if we were formerly "chastized with rods" we should then be chastized with scorpions"? That exulting in short, in an opportunity which the papal powers have long and ardently wished for, of extirpating from among us, what they impiously call the *Northern Heresy*, they would stop at no means, however sanguinary or violent, to root out the very remembrance of it from the earth?—Then might we "sit down by the waters of *Babylon*, and weep at the remembrance of our *Sion*." Then might we wish for those religious assemblies we have despised; for those sacred ordinances we have neglected and turned our backs on; but they will be far away: Then may we in the bitterness of our souls, lament our many vices and impieties which have brought down these heavy judgments upon us, and wish, when too late, for the return of that religion, the loss of which, whatever may be our thoughts of it at present, we should then find to be the most dreadful of all the calamities, which the Divine Being in his anger could inflict upon us.

Nor would our situation, should this last of evils fall upon us, be at all better with respect to our temporal concerns. For whether we should be governed immediately by a viceroy from *France*, or have the descendant of an abjured Pretender, set up to rule over us, we should in either case become equally a Province to that Power. And as this could not be brought about but by force of arms; as it can never be supposed, degenerate as we are, that we should tamely bow our necks to the yoke; every inch of ground they gained, every step they made, would

be

be marked with the extreamest ~~rain~~ and desolation. "Then
 " should our Children be delivered up to the famine, and their
 " blood be poured out by the sword: then should our wives be
 " bereaved of their Children and be widows, and our men be put
 " to death, and our young men be slain by the sword in battle."
 These however would be but "the beginning of sorrows." The
 miseries that would ensue, the severities of a *Gallic* thralldom,
 would be more grievous, as they would be more lasting, than
 even the ravages of their victorious and rapacious army.—Our pro-
 perty would no longer be secured by Laws, no more should we sit
 under our own vine and under our own figtree, enjoying the
 produce of our labours in tranquillity and chearfulness; but must
 be content to hold our possessions, our persons, and even our
 very lives, by no other tenure than the will of an arbitrary and
 despotic Tyrant.—Our Trade the great source of wealth and power
 to these Kingdoms, would then be ravished from us, and trans-
 ferred to our haughty Lords; and as it was prophecied of *Tyre*,
 "our riches, our fairs, our merchandise, our mariners, and our
 "pilots, and our calkers, and all the men of war that are in our
 "cities, and all the company that is in the midst of us" would
 no more be heard of from that day of our ruin.—And to close
 the whole, our Constitution, the noblest effort of human wis-
 dom, the pride and glory of its possessors, and the envy and admi-
 ration of the whole world, would then be torn up by the roots;
 and from having been the freest and the happiest people upon the
 face of the whole earth, we should become the most slavish and
 the

the most miserable, a burden to ourselves and the scorn and derision of them that are round about us.

Such are the evils with which we are threatened: The means by which, with the blessing of God, we may hope to escape them, fall next under our consideration—Now these can only be founded in an active and uniform observance of the rules of piety and virtue in all ranks of men among us. Whoever considers with any degree of attention, the dispensations of Providence as manifested in the course of human affairs, will discover that the happiness and misery, the rise and downfall of states, have ever kept pace with the purity or dissolution of their manners. Look into the annals of all ages, consult the history of all nations, and you will see that they unanimously concur in bearing testimony to this truth. View the *Assyrian* and *Persian* Monarchies, the *Grecian*, *Roman*, and *Carthaginian* Republics, and you will find, that as long as they maintained a rectitude of conduct, they flourished in power and prosperity; but no sooner did they grow profligate and licentious, than the mighty fabric tottered to its foundations, and gradually sunk into weakness, contempt, and destruction: And sorry am I to add, that it was not till *Britain* became one of the most degenerate, that she ceased to be the happiest of nations. And indeed, not to mention, at present, the direct tendency that virtue and vice have to raise or depress a people; the Divine Being is in some sort, if I may so express myself, obliged to exert himself in this conspicuous manner, or one of the principal parts of his

moral government, the equitable distribution of rewards and punishments, go undischarged. With regard to individuals, as they are amenable at another tribunal, and are reserved for a future judgment, to "receive according to the things done in the body," "whether they be good, or whether they be bad," it is no impeachment of providence, though its most faithful servants should sometimes be very sorely afflicted, and the wicked and irreligious flourish in the full enjoyment of every temporal felicity. But as to states and kingdoms, the case is widely different. When once this scene of things is changed, and we enter upon a new state of existence, all combinations are dissolved, and each person is responsible only for his own particular conduct: With respect to these therefore, an equal retribution must be made in this life, or it cannot be made at all.—And if this is the case, if righteousness, both in the natural course of things, and by the particular interposition of "providence, exalteth a nation," and "sin is the reproach," and if persisted in, the ruin of every people who commit it; how loudly do the present circumstances of affairs call upon us to a national humiliation and repentance, since without them, it is not the most powerful navy, the most numerous and best disciplined army, the wisest heads to contrive, or the boldest hands to execute, that can save us from the stroke of that avenging arm "which maketh a land *desolate* for the wickedness of them that dwell therein."

But urgent and unanswerable as the demands upon us for such a conduct undoubtedly are, they will yet appear infinitely heightened,
should

should we take the most cursory survey of the present state of religion and morals amongst us. Far, very far, I call heaven to witness, is it, from being an agreeable employment, to expose the nakedness of my country, or lay open to your view that horrid depravation of manners, which is every-where so prevalent; but as the sense of our guilt is a necessary step to its ~~relinquishment~~, the place I stand in, the relation I bear towards you, the *approaching solemnity*, and the heavy judgments of God, which hang over our heads, and seem ready to fall upon us, all conspire to exact it from me.

And in this review, the first object that must strike every serious and considerate mind, not only as the most atrocious of our crimes in itself, but as the ultimate cause of every other evil we have to complain of, is that baneful spirit of infidelity, which has of late years been so rife and so malignant amongst us. How has that best gift of heaven to mankind, the Christian dispensation, been set at nought, its evidences controverted, its doctrines misrepresented, its institutions ridiculed and prophaned, and even the salvation and redemption it holds forth to us, by the death and sufferings of its Divine Author, trampled upon as an unholy thing! Nor have the unhappy patrons of these tenets, confined their attacks to revelation only, but have used their utmost efforts to root out from the world, what in the opinion of the best and wisest men in all ages of it, have ever been esteemed the first and fundamental principles of natural religion. We have seen the Being, at least the providence of God, openly disputed, his moral

attributes denied, the belief of a future state, the natural consequence of those attributes, laughed at and derided. And, as these principles are but too well adapted to favour the corruption of our nature, as they tend to loosen those restraints which to a depraved and sensual mind, will ever appear grievous and burdensome, they have been listened to with attention, embraced with transport, and propagated with ardour. From hence have proceeded, (and what better could be expected from it?) a profligacy and dissolution of manners in all ranks of men, beyond the example of former ages. From this source are derived "those floods of ungodliness which with so much reason make us afraid." Hence those frequent suicides which at once distinguish and disgrace our nation. Hence those horrid oath and execrations we hourly hear in every corner of our streets; hence the robberies, murders, perjuries, leudness and unnatural lusts, that abound among us. For notwithstanding all that may have been said to the contrary, religion and morality will ever keep pace together, and where the benign influences of the one are wanting, the other will ever proportionably languish and decay.

Another melancholy symptom in our case, and which calls for an immediate remedy; is that extreme love of pleasure, at present so universally prevalent. "The poor and the rich, here meet together," or if their pursuits are different, they are yet equally ruinous to themselves, and destructive to the community. Instead of having recourse to diversion and amusement, to unbend the mind from

from the fatigues and cares of life, and dispose it to discharge the necessary duties of it with greater vigour and alacrity; the bulk of mankind seem to consider them as the only important business. No interval of recollection can be allowed: No time, not even that portion of it, which both by divine and human appointments, should be consecrated to far different purposes, can be spared from its allurements: But fortune, friends and family, every valuable and interesting concern both of the present world and the next, are wantonly and eagerly offered up before the shrine of this all-prevailing idol.

Connected with, and no less sinful in itself or pernicious in its effects, than the foregoing article of our conduct; is that spirit of luxury and extravagance, so visible in all ranks and conditions of life. Not even the calamities of war, nor the excessive incumbrances under which we necessarily labour in consequence of it, aggravated by a scarcity, hardly ever before known in these kingdoms, have been able to restrain its demands. The plainness and simplicity of manners, once the distinguishing characteristic of the *British* nation, is now entirely lost; and men vie with each other in vanity and riot: Insomuch, that those pursuits which are most licentious and expensive, are deemed the most elegant and polite. And as the demands necessarily arising from such a conduct, quickly lay waste the fairest fortunes, and involve their possessors in innumerable difficulties, recourse is had to gaming, by some as a fund for supply; while others, disqualified by their vices to enjoy, and incapacitated by their
ignorance

ignorance to support a rational and improving conversation, and fond of every thing, however ridiculous or destructive, that has the stamp of fashion to give it currency, eagerly adopt the practice, till at length it has become as epidemic as it is malignant.

Nor are our prospects at all fairer, or our expectations more promising, from those who are coming on, than from those who are going off the stage. The directions under which our youth too generally set out, and the examples that are continually placed before their eyes, are by no means calculated to revive either knowledge or virtue amongst us. Instead of having their minds seasoned with proper sentiments of their duty, in the several relations in which they stand to God and their fellow-creatures; and being laid under those restraints to which the heat and impetuosity so incident to persons at their time of life indispensably require; they are turned loose into the world, with all their passions and appetites full blown upon them, introduced into the gayest and most licentious scenes of it, an intimacy with which, and the arts and mysteries of play, or at most, a proficiency in the exterior forms and punctilios of behaviour, are usually regarded as the only necessary or valuable accomplishments.

Who is there that considers these things with seriousness and attention, and compares the temper and disposition of the present times, with that of other nations when just upon the point of dissolution; but must confess with pain and anguish of heart the too striking

striking resemblance? Like them “ we sit down to eat and to drink
 “ and rise up to play :” Like them “ we have the harp and the viol,
 “ the tabret and the pipe, and wine in our feasts” and like them
 “ we regard not the work of the Lord, nor the operations of his
 “ hands” equally unmindful of that Divine Benefactor, to whom we
 are indebted for our enjoyments ; and inattentive to the obligations
 those enjoyments lay upon us. Like theirs, our national prosperity
 has been abused to the purposes of intemperance and vice, and “ the
 “ things which were intended for our wealth, we have, as weakly
 “ as wickedly, made unto us an occasion of falling.” And if our
 vices are so similar, is there not room to apprehend that our punish-
 ment may be so too? Have we not reason to fear, especially when
 we consider the unfavourable aspect our affairs have hitherto worn,
 that the Almighty is preparing “ to visit for these things, and that
 “ he will assuredly be avenged of such a nation as this”?

Or could we flatter ourselves, which however we have not the
 least reason to do, that God would withhold from us the evils of
 his positive judgments, yet should we not therefore be at all the
 more secure : since the national depravity, from the nature of the
 vices that constitute it, cannot, unless speedily reformed, but as cer-
 tainly though perhaps more slowly destroy us. — In the brief review
 which we have taken of the public manners, we have seen that ir-
 religion, luxury, and an intemperate pursuit of pleasure, form the ruling
 characters of the times ; each of which vices, by a necessary and
 inseparable connexion in the established order of things, leads to
 misery

misery and ruin ; but when united must hurry them on with the utmost rapidity and precipitation. A disregard to religion and its awful sanctions, strikes at the very root of society, as it leaves men under no other restraints but those which human laws impose, which in the nature of things, are ever partial and ineffective ; cancels the obligation of an oath, the great bond of social life ; sets men loose from all the ties of conscience, and by annihilating every hope of future existence, and levelling mankind with the beasts that perish, introduces, into each breast where it is admitted, the extremest pusillanimity, cowardice and dejection. And as irreligion saps the foundations of government, so luxury and an inordinate love of pleasure as effectually level the outworks of it ; as they destroy the capacity, and beget an indisposition for the most necessary business ; extinguish all public spirit ; quench every enlarged and generous affection of the human mind ; prey upon the constitution ; impair the strength ; debase the courage ; and deprave the morals of all that are subject to their influence ; and, in the end, introduce indigence and distress ; to relieve themselves from which, and secure the continuance of their favorite gratifications, they become venal and corrupt, profligate and abandoned, ready to join with any faction, or engage in any measures, however injurious to individuals, however pernicious to the community.

And if these vices are ruinous and destructive to every people where they prevail, they are more exceedingly fatal in a land of liberty. Arbitrary and despotic governments, from the nature of their

their



their respective constitutions, possess within themselves certain principles of internal strength which are frequently able to expel their malignity, or at least in some degree counterwork its influence: Whereas in free states, as the sole strength of such is founded on the virtues of their subjects; when this is destroyed, and profligate manners begin generally to abound, they necessarily go on to produce their full effects, without check or controul, which speedily end in the extremest desolation and wretchedness.

And if such is the stated order of events, if effects so certainly correspond to their causes, who is there that takes the slightest view of the present state of the moral world, but must see that destruction is advancing upon us with large and hasty strides, and that there is but too much reason to fear that "it is near at hand, even at our very doors?"

Amidst these apprehensions however at once so dreadful, and so well founded, let it still be remembered "that to the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, that he spareth when we deserve punishment, and in his wrath thinketh upon mercy." And let this recollection animate us to act suitable thereto. Let it engage us especially to observe the *approaching solemnity*, appointed by royal authority, to deprecate the displeasure of the Almighty, and implore his blessing on our fleets and armies, in that devout and solemn manner that is suitable to the pious design of its institution. Who can tell but it may be the final overture of heaven to a guilty land? The

last opportunity that may ever be afforded us, to reconcile ourselves to our offended God? Oh then! Let not our neglect of it be added to inflame our account! But let us with the deepest humiliation and contrition, with fasting and praying, present ourselves before God in the solemn assembly of his church. “ Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, saying, spare thy people, O Lord, spare them, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that their enemies should rule over them.” And let the people of all ranks and conditions, with pious zeal, and undissembled fervour, join in the same devout supplications, till their united intercessions ascend to heaven, and bring down a blessing on themselves, and on their country.—Nor let us think, that in doing this, we shall have done all that is our duty to do. The passing one day well is so far from being all that is necessary, that the appearances of humiliation and repentance without the reality (and they never can be real if temporary and fugitive) will only be an aggravation of our guilt. To what purpose is it “ that we bow down our heads like a bulrush, and spread sackcloth and ashes under us,” “ if our goodness is to be as the cloud, and as the early dew that passeth away?” Will the bare exterior signs of contrition and godly sorrow be sufficient to propitiate the offended Majesty of heaven? Will he accept the meer labour of the lips, while the heart is far from him? No.—God is not to be mocked.—If we would have him for our friend, if we really wish to arrest his avenging arm, we must carry this contrition into our lives and conversations, and by an uniform and lasting attention to every moral and religious obligation,

gation, shew that our professions are sincere. If we indeed desire to escape the dreadful calamities that hang over our heads, it can only be done by reforming that system of conduct and behaviour, of which they are the certain and inevitable consequences. Let the great then, and those in the upper stations of life, as they have but too much contributed to spread the contagion of irreligion and immorality, by their bad examples, now endeavour to promote the opposite virtues by the efficacy of a good one.—Let their inferiors, who have been so ready to imitate them in their follies and in their vices, be as ready to emulate them in what is laudable and praiseworthy. And let us all, high and low, rich and poor, one with another, “turn from our evil way and from the violence that is in our hand.” Let us sacrifice every appetite and passion, every desire and inclination, that may be offensive to the Almighty, “or unworthy the vocation wherewith we are called.” Then may we hope that “the Lord will be entreated for our Land” and that “he will repent of the evil he threatens to do unto us, and do it not.” Then may we go forth with courage and resolution to battle, in an humble confidence that the same God of armies, whose goodness we have so frequently experienced in the protection of our religion and liberties, will again combat on our side, and after a successful and victorious war, restore to us the blessing of a lasting and honourable peace.

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gation, that our professions are sincere. If we indeed desire to escape the dreadful calamities that hang over our heads, it can only be done by retaining that system of conduct and behavior, of which they are the certain and inevitable consequences. Let the great men, and those in the upper stratum of life, as they have but too much contributed to spread the contagion of infidelity and immorality, by their bad examples, now endeavor to promote the opposite virtues by the efficacy of a good one—let their instruction who have been so ready to imitate them in their follies and in their vices, be as ready to emulate them in what is laudable and praiseworthy. And let us all, high and low, rich and poor, one with another, "turn from our evil way and from the violence that is in our hand." Let us forsake every opposite and passion, every do- the and inclination, that may be opposed to the Almighty, "let us worthy the vocation wherewith we are called." Then may we hope that "the Lord will be merciful for our Land," and that "he will repent of the evil he threatens to do unto us, and do it not." Then may we go forth with courage and resolution to battle, in an humble confidence that the Lord God of armies, whose goodness we have so frequently experienced in the protection of our religion and liberties, will again combat on our side, and after a glorious and victorious war, restore to us the blessing of a lasting and honorable peace.



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